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f. 2007

145-11 f. 2007.



"CAN SHE KEEP THE SECRET?"



"We went in and found Alice surrounded by her brothers and sisters."—P. 12.

“ CAN SHE KEEP THE SECRET ? ”

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CHILDREN’S PRIZE.”

LONDON :

WILLIAM MACINTOSH, 24 PATERNOSTER ROW.

1866.



LONDON :
STRANGEWAYS AND WALDEN, Printers, 28 Castle St. Leicester



“CAN SHE KEEP THE SECRET?”

CHAPTER I.

“CAN she keep the secret?” These words were asked me by one who, in her large-hearted charity, had consented to take into her house a servant who, though recommended by me, had indeed a secret, and a painful one.

I answered that I did not know whether one ought to expect her to keep it, but that I would ask her.

The friend to whom I was sending her lived in London; and it was agreed between us, after much anxious consultation, that when I returned to Elminster, I should at once arrange for Alice West's entering on her new situation as housemaid in Mrs. Ainsworth's family; also that I should in

the meantime ascertain whether she could keep this secret, not from her mistress, but from her fellow-servants.

From a little child I had loved Alice. In the school, her modest, quiet way had won upon me; and her large blue eyes had appeared to drink in eagerly the truths I had sought to teach. She was clever in all ways, and, though unwilling to put herself forward, she could not help knowing that she was looked upon with special favour. Everything she did, whether with book or needle, was well done. After a school examination, we were almost sure to be asked further of that pretty bright girl who had answered, or written, or worked so well. We knew that the time must come when she would have to leave us for service, and were doing what we could to prepare her for her future life.

But not only in school was she setting a good example. She had prepared herself humbly, but most carefully, for her Confirmation, and had not, by light word or gesture, given us occasion to doubt her steadfastness. She was one of the first who came to receive the crowning blessing of her vows from him who had taught her their meaning. Not *once or twice*, but often she came, with a pure and

obedient heart, as I truly believe, to that holy table of Communion.

Then she left Elminster for a situation at a small town a few miles away ; and her time of trial began just when she stood most in need of the helps she was leaving. In this, her first place, she was kindly treated, and allowed the usual maid-of-all-work's privilege of going *once* to church on Sunday, and that always in the afternoon ; and no particular care being taken as to where she sat when she went there, she often lost great part of the service, and came back distracted by the recollection of the jests and bad behaviour which had been going on round her. Till at last the only teaching she received in the week—the twenty minutes of the sermon—came to be the time in all the week most dreaded by her.

It is true that she was summoned into the little parlour on Sunday nights, and that on these occasions Mr. Smith read a chapter and a prayer, but Alice had not as yet felt herself stirred up by this religious exercise to a greater degree of holiness. Mr. Smith was not a good reader ; he had not had the advantages which Alice herself had had, and therefore what was meant for her good proved to be rather an annoyance to her. She

longed for personal sympathy, and though her master and mistress were good, kind people, they never thought of giving it. They believed they were doing their duty, but their mistake was that they forgot that they had once been young and thoughtless themselves.

They saw that Alice was modest and steady, and thought they were helping to make and keep her so. They never thought of any struggle; they took it for granted that her life must be free from temptation. What could she want more than good food and a comfortable home?

Yes, Mrs. Smith, you little knew, when you followed her down to church—congratulating yourself on her neat and quiet dress, “So different from those flaunting girls,” as you remark—you little knew that those very girls would taunt her with it on her way back, having in some way scraped an acquaintance with her: that they would call her dowdy and shabby, and ask her why she didn’t dress as smartly as Mrs. Smith’s other maid, and tell her that they wouldn’t be kept so close—not they!

A few earnest, outspoken words of yours in praise of *her* way, in condemnation of *theirs* who *spend all their money* on their backs, how much

they would have encouraged her ! But you were silent, and she thought, perhaps, you didn't care.

Or when you knew that she was alone in the kitchen—her work done, her time on her hands—did it never occur to you that her thoughts might wander to her home, and that, in thinking of it and wondering what they were doing there, a desolation should come over her ? She is only sixteen, remember, and she has no one to whom to pour out her heart, for you have strictly forbidden any talking with the servant next door over the garden palings. Every few weeks, indeed, she writes home : and once I had a letter from her, and in return she gets one from me now and then, and from home more seldom. The sending off a letter in the West family is a great event, and when it comes it tells very little she cares to know.

So, Mrs. Smith, why don't you go to her and talk to her of her home—of her little brothers and sisters—above all, of her church and her promises ? You take too much for granted, indeed you do ; you think it is more easy to be good than it is ; and so, Sunday after Sunday, Alice West sits alone in the kitchen—improving in looks, growing into a fine, tall young woman, but in heart slowly yet surely going farther from God.

A year has nearly passed away, and she has never spoken to the clergyman of the parish in which she lives—never once been to the Holy Communion. Her prayers, too, have grown more careless, both at home and in church ; and she has begun to think that, after all, people get on quite as well without being so strict.





CHAPTER II.

THE year had passed, and Mrs. Smith and Alice had agreed that they would not part just yet; her mistress knew her value, and Alice did not wish to throw herself out of a situation. Times had been bad at home; her father had been out of health, often unable to work, and one of her brothers was disabled at the same time by an accident; so that she was anxious to lighten the burden, instead of adding to it by throwing herself on their hands. A holiday was promised her, and to this she eagerly looked forward.

To be her own mistress for three days—to wander in the green fields and by the hedgerows, and gather the flowers of her own garden again; all these seemed now great luxuries.


But her joy at the thought of them was not quite unmixed. She remembered that we always

expected to see those who came home, and to learn from themselves how they were getting on; and it may be that she scarcely liked to own that she was satisfied with the life she was now leading.

Be that as it may, one of the pleasantest of the pleasant sights of Christmas morning to me, was a glimpse I caught of her face as she walked by her father's side into church, her whole expression beaming with delight. I thought, too, how happy all the West family must be to have her at home again.

I am not sure whether she intended to come to see us, because it happened that we were calling that very evening to see a sick woman who lived next door to the Wests, and in that cottage fell in with Mrs. West, who asked us to step in and speak to Alice. My husband thought, "She must be glad to have her at home," and was not altogether satisfied with the tone in which she replied, that "Young people nowadays were in a greater hurry to get out than to come back."

We went in, however, and found Alice surrounded by her brothers and sisters, and wonderfully grown and improved in appearance. She was pretty in face, and winning in manner, and *seemed glad to see us*. Mr. Wood remarked,



that he had not thought she was at home, as he had not seen her at church that morning; but both she and I corrected him, and in answer to his remark, that it could only have been for the first part of the service, a deep colour overspread her face.

"But, perhaps, Alice," he said, "you have lately had the opportunity of Communion, and you felt unsettled by coming home? Still, I should have been glad to see you with your father this morning, keeping the Feast together."

She muttered some indistinct words about "never getting out in the morning," but was obliged to confess that she had never asked to be allowed to do so. At last she broke down under her pastor's inquiries, and owned that she had been living a careless life.

"If I had stopped here, sir, I should have been better."

"But, my child, don't you know that we had been trying to train you for all this, and that if you had really wished it, you could have lived as careful a life at Downham as here, though you might have found it much harder to do so with fewer helps and privileges? Now, take courage, and when you go back, ask your mistress to give

you leave to go to church now and then in the morning, and tell her why you wish it. If you make a friend of her, perhaps she will help you."

The remainder of Alice's holiday was much happier. The past was forgotten, and she had some faint resolutions of doing better; at all events, there now remained no confession to make.

She resolved to go to her mistress immediately, as Mr. Wood had desired, and she thought over all she would say to her, imagining difficulties on Mrs. Smith's part, which were to be met on her side with reasons for doing her duty.

As she went back, she became impatient to say all that was in her mind, her little home visit had roused her to a recollection of what she used to be, and had made her see how far back she had fallen without being aware of it.

But, unluckily, when she reached Downham, she found that Mrs. Smith had been summoned to a sick relation, and that it was quite uncertain when she would come home.

How many a turn is given to all our after-life by a small thing, as we think it—a circumstance beyond our own control, which we call lucky or unlucky, as the case may be, but which is one of *God's ways of trying us*. Alice was more left to

herself than ever ; Mr. Smith being in business was away nearly all day, and very often in the evening, and she began to hope that he might spend his Sunday also away from home, and leave her hers undisturbed. She remembered that it was the first Sunday of the month, and that there would be Holy Communion. She resolved to ask her master that very day, if she could be spared to go. She heard his step, and was thinking how she should frame her request, when he looked in.

“ Alice,” he said, “ I shall have two or three friends to dine with me on Sunday : I am sorry for it, because they are coming from a distance, and I must have a hot dinner. You will be able to manage without your mistress ? ”

Alice said “ Yes, sir ; ” the last sentence roused her pride and made her forget her disappointment. “ Do without my mistress ? yes, I should think so ! ” she said to herself.

Sunday came, a harder day than usual to her, but she did not grieve. “ It was not her fault,” she said ; and she spoke truly, but she did not stop to ask herself whether she was doing what she could at home to prevent injury to her soul.

In some of the lowliest duties, and with no helps or privileges, many of the saints of God have

been perfected. Whatever our difficulties may be, God never allows it to be impossible for us to live near to Him. But then, through all those duties, the face must be steadily turned towards Him; the heart must not be dragged down to a worldly level; for from that depth it is very hard to raise it.

We have said that Alice did not take the troubles of that special Sunday to heart, but she felt unsettled. She flattered herself that she wished to better herself in the right sense; she had a vague notion that she would get on better somewhere else, and so she determined, that when Mrs. Smith returned she would tell her that she wished to leave.

But when the relation whom she had been nursing died, and Mrs. Smith went into mourning, she gave Alice such handsome presents of clothing, that she could not quite make up her mind to appear ungrateful. So they went on much as before for another six months, Alice growing neither much better nor worse. Once she had asked to go to Holy Communion and had been allowed to go, but she had not taken much pains that it should be a benefit and blessing, and therefore it could not *be expected that she should find it so.*

At last the opportunity for change which Alice had so long desired came to her. A large establishment was forming in the neighbourhood of Downham, in consequence of the marriage of a young nobleman. Alice applied for the situation of under-housemaid, and, with the character Mrs. Smith gave her, she had no difficulty in obtaining it. Mrs. Glib, the housekeeper, was struck by her manner and appearance, and seemed quite as anxious to secure her as Alice was to go.

In a week from the time she applied for the place she was sitting down to her meals with twenty-five strangers, men and women.

At first she was perfectly astonished at the conversation which surrounded her. Luckily, being new to it all, she was not expected to talk, nor to enter into it, and she did not wish to bring any notice on herself by a word of protest. Every now and then she looked up to the end of the table where sat Mrs. Glib, as if she expected some check to come from her. But Mrs. Glib serenely ate her dinner, while the wildest license of talk went on round her.

Alice heard her new master, Lord Marsden, cut up and laughed at, and all sorts of opinions hazarded as to what his young bride would be

like. It didn't much signify, however, they said, she couldn't interfere much with them. Winks and nods were exchanged amongst those most distant from Mrs. Glib, which were intended to signify that she would reign undisturbed.

Alice received a good deal of attention, and some rough compliments, which brought the colour into her face, and on the whole she liked her new life.

It had in it a good deal of excitement, and the very getting the large old house ready, though it involved hard work, and early and late hours, was more to the taste of the strong, active girl, than Mrs. Smith's quiet little kitchen, and her regular hours.

Each one had his or her work assigned, and provided it was well done, no complaint was made.

New brooms sweep clean, and at present the brooms were all new, and Mrs. Glib detected no great short-comings. She was busy herself, and fairly good-tempered, considering how much depended on her, and Alice being clever and quick soon won golden opinions from her.



CHAPTER III.

WE at Elminster had begun to be anxious to hear from Alice herself. A few lines telling her parents of her change of situation were not sufficient enough to satisfy us. In a few weeks, however, she wrote at greater length, and sent a message to us which sounded satisfactory. She thought we should be glad to hear that her wages were doubled, and that now her lord and lady had returned, it was settled that she should have her Sundays almost free.

In conclusion, she expressed her "wonder that she had put up all this time with the dullness of Mrs. Smith's kitchen."

Knowing, as we did, that Lady Marsden had come from a family noted as widely for its goodness as for its old nobility, and that her father and

mother looked carefully to the ways of their household, we also were inclined to think Alice very fortunate; and six months later, when being at Downham Park, we asked to see Alice, we had no reason to change our opinion.

Bright and happy as ever, and softened and improved in manner, she had attracted the attention of Lady Marsden, even before we mentioned our interest in her. Her extreme modesty had remained to her, and Lady Marsden had been struck with this. She kindly promised that, as far as she could do so, she would watch over Alice, and let us hear at any time that she thought advice was necessary, if such an occasion should arrive.

It is almost needless to say that Alice was attracting other attention than that of her mistress; two successive footmen had offered her such affection as had remained to them after having had three other places. And not only so, but it was generally hinted in the servants' hall that Mr. Bland, the butler, had never been known to be so civil to any one of the under-servants. Many a sly hint was given at Alice's expense about her privileges.

"I don't think I should have heard the last of

it, if that had happened to me," said Emma, the upper-housemaid ; when Alice, coming fast round a corner, knocked a decanter out of his hand, spilling the wine over his clothes. This happening just before dinner was announced, a storm of wrath was expected from the great man. But, to the surprise of those who happened to be lookers-on, he only said, with a smile,—

"Never mind, Alice, it is not often you do anything awkward."

The "you" was too marked to escape the notice of Emma, who considered herself insulted, and tossed her head accordingly, making the above remark, which proved the key-note of many like it, so that at last Alice, with a burning face, left the chatterers to themselves. Not that either Mr. Bland or the footmen had any place in her thoughts. Like most other people, she preferred to be liked than disliked, but no one had as yet won from her any special mark of regard.

To say the truth, she was indulging a habit against which she had had to fight from a little child—the passionate love of reading whatever came in her way, stories particularly.

Mr. Wood had observed that she always took out the most trifling books in the lending library.

and had gently warned her not to read these only ; but it happened that her mistress, Lady Marsden, had the opportunity of doing so also.

One afternoon, Alice believed that her lady was gone out, and thought there could be no harm in looking about her when she went to attend to the bedroom fires. She did not see any book likely to interest her, but she was absorbed in a newspaper, when Lady Marsden entered by a door close beside which she stood.

Alice put down the paper and coloured violently, and was leaving the room, when Lady Marsden desired her to stay for a moment. Alice looked up quickly ; the voice was so kind, she felt no fear.

“ Alice, another time you must not do this.”

“ No, my lady ; I am very sorry, I know I was taking a great liberty.”

“ Well, yes, you were taking a liberty, of course ; but if that was all, I should not so much mind. I think, however, that you must be rather too fond of reading anything that comes in your way,—are you not ? ”

Alice stammered that “ she was very fond of reading, and had always been used to it.”

“ *Very well*, then, I will lend you one book

each week, Alice, on condition that you take none without leave. Now I must consider this a distinct order on my part, and promise on yours."

"Yes, my lady, and thank you."

But as she tripped away her feeling was that she had got off easily, and that it was great luck to have been caught by Lady Marsden rather than by Mrs. Glib.

For a few weeks the promised books were lent, and duly returned, and Alice had little temptation to break her promise. The house was full of company, and she had little time for reading.

About this time, too, a rumour arose in the servants' hall that if Mr. Bland meant anything by his attention to Alice, he ought to bestir himself, as more than once a formidable rival had been seen in her company. This was the only son of Lord Marsden's chief agent, in every way considerably above Alice in position,

It was known to all that his father would never hear of his marrying her, and, therefore, the steady ones of the household bid her beware; to which she answered, with a little toss of her head, that she hoped she could take care of herself; any-

thing serious on the subject she treated as being caused by spite or envy, so that at last her friends were silent, and her enemies sneered.

Mr. Bland was sincerely attached to her, and offered to make her his wife, but he met with a decided refusal.

All did not go smoothly with Alice, however. From one cause or other Lady Marsden had forgotten to lend her books, and so she considered herself at liberty to break her part of the agreement.

The autumn shooting season was setting in, and there were a good many young people staying in the house; among them was Lady Agnes Hope, Lady Marsden's youngest sister, a giddy young girl. While attending to a morning room in which the young ladies amused themselves, Alice's attention was caught by a book which was lying open on a table.

She had no intention of reading it when she took it up to dust it, but she thought there could be no harm in just looking at the open page. This she read, and the next, and the next. Her face burning no less from the effect of the words she read, than from the knowledge that she was

acting as dishonestly as if she had taken an article of dress belonging to Lady Agnes, and appropriated it to herself.

For was it intended that this book, a trashy novel of the day, should be read by a village girl?

Could it be that these words were for any pure maidenly eye, be it hers or Lady Agnes'?

And again the tempter whispered, that if it did Lady Agnes no harm neither could it harm her.

The inner door opened, and Alice quickly turned away when Jeannette, the French maid, came in, and asked for some work left there. The girl looked at her hard, and Alice coloured again; but it was only because her voice trembled that Jeannette noticed her.

She hastily finished her work, and replaced the book, which had fascinated her in this deadly way. She remembered that a riding party had been proposed, and also that she had heard Jeannette say how much she should like to see the gardens. So she thought she could contrive this when the ladies were out, by sending Jeannette with one of the under-housemaids. Alice herself

had arrived at the dignity of being the head of them.

But the afternoon was wet, and there was no riding, and her longing to rush through the book which haunted her remained unsatisfied. Still it haunted her, this desire to know evil, for evil it was. The words which had made her cheek burn were the words of shameful love.

But there seemed no chance for Alice. All through the day she thought of nothing else. The desire clung to her, and she could not shake it off. Alas ! that she never tried !

The opportunity came, however. The servants were long at supper, and very jovial. Alice was silent, and had quickly finished. Under pretence of looking to the fires, she hurried up to the morning room, and as she passed the hall, into which the principal sitting-rooms opened, she heard the sound of singing and laughing, and she believed that all was safe.

She quietly closed the door, and gently stirring the fire, began to look for the book. It was not where she had seen it in the morning, but an intense longing possessed her. She turned over



papers, drawings, cushions, and at last she found it, and exclaimed with joy.

But as she passed the large mirror, she started at her own reflection, and then crouching down before the fire she read.

On and on, page after page opening to her a guilty life, of which, in her guiltiest moments, she had never so much as dreamed.

Strong and telling language, pretence of morality, but hidden and unholy meanings, surely sapping purity and uprightness.

How would she have turned from it had the temptation come upon her when she was fully armed! but now she was wholly unarmed, and she fell.

Her prayers, her God, had been forgotten, and she stood alone. For a moment she would have given all she had to be rid of this oppressive curiosity, but the next it returned upon her stronger than ever, and her determination was fixed, to finish the tale at all hazards.

There she crouched, with a beating heart and listening ear; could anything in the shape of pleasure balance such pain as this? Sometimes she had carried off books to her own room, but never *yet one like this*. But she did take it there, and

then there was no chance of getting it back again, however much she might have wished it. The servants were dispersing, and the two younger ones, who shared her room, came yawning up to bed, and laughed at Alice for sitting up to read. One of them asked her to read aloud, which, however, she declined to do.





CHAPTER IV.

VERY soon the house was quiet, and Alice, with weary eyes and throbbing head, prepared for bed. She slipped the book under her pillow, and knelt down, but not to pray. Images of unholy things started up between her and her prayers; sacred words were on her lips, sinful words were in her mind, and occupied **her heart**.

She lay down with very little real comfort, but with no thought of danger of discovery, when the handle of the door was gently turned, and Jeannette, looking very pale and tired, came in; she was evidently seeking some one, and went in turn to each bed till she came to Alice, whose conscience told her that it was herself that was sought.

Jeannette whispered, "The book, Alice! have you seen it?"

"*Seen a book!* yes, I should think so, you silly

girl!" answered Alice, with recovered courage: "a great many books; but what do you mean?"

"Ah, it is one that must go back by first train to-morrow morning, and my lady says I cannot go to bed till it is found; and I am so tired, Alice."

"Well, Jeannette, don't you tell; promise, oh do, there's a good girl!" and so saying she gave her the book, which Jeannette no sooner received than, heedless of conditions, she rushed off.

Lady Agnes was tired also, and asked no questions. The book was found, and that was enough. But there was one who listened eagerly,—the younger of the two maids who shared Alice's room, a pert young girl, who had suffered from her caprice, lay awake drinking in with satisfaction what she heard: she debated within herself whether the knowledge she now possessed should be imparted straightway to Mrs. Glib, or kept as a private instrument of torture for her own use. She would let it depend on circumstances, and so deciding she again fell asleep.

The next morning the two girls rose, to all appearance the same as they were the day before, but neither felt the same. Alice was not troubled about the fault, but she was absorbed in the hope, by *some means* or other, of getting hold of the

remaining volume. She felt almost certain it would come, and that it had not yet been in the house.

Phœbe, the younger girl, was saucier than ever, and contradicted Alice flatly several times. She had a hold over her which made her treat her as an inferior. At last Alice summoned Mrs. Glib, and told her that she could do nothing with Phœbe, who was pert and wilful beyond all bearing.

Mrs. Glib quickly began to rebuke Phœbe, and tell her that she would not have disobedience. She "only wished Phœbe might ever be half such a good servant as Alice."

"And take my lady's books up-stairs and read them on the sly, as she did last night, I suppose," cried Phœbe, in a towering passion, while Alice's lips grew white. Mrs. Glib looked from one to the other.

"Ask Jeannette, then, if you don't believe me; she came for a book after the clock struck one, and they had been looking everywhere, she said."

"Why, Alice, you don't mean to say you had it! Why, we were hunting all over the drawing-rooms, and my lord was very angry. He scolded

everybody, and, most of all, Lady Agnes, for having the book at all. Why, Alice, I couldn't have believed it; I never did such a thing in all my life."

Alice was very angry and indignant, but she could not deny it or excuse herself. "She thought she had better leave."

"Not this time, Alice, but if it happens again." How her proud spirit chafed and rebelled against the disgrace she had brought on herself. To be lowered in the eyes of such a girl as Phœbe, who she knew would never forget it, but cast it up against her at every opportunity. So she felt degraded altogether, and an evil influence was at work outside, which did not help to raise her in any way.

Mrs. Glib had an illness, and was obliged to leave, and her successor was an entire stranger to the household. Alice had now, therefore, an opportunity of redeeming her character, had she been so inclined. But she was not resolved to do this, and by little and little she forfeited what remained to her. She did not sink at once. Sometimes for a few weeks she struggled and conquered, but then, again, she was conquered in turn. She came home several times, but only for a few hours,

and so it happened that we never saw her. Lady Marsden, too, went abroad, so that we could not hear from her of Alice.

It might be two years from the time she entered Lord Marsden's house, and when Alice was about nineteen, that, taking shelter from a heavy shower in her mother's cottage, I was amazed to find her there. The fact of her being at home would not of itself have surprised me, but it was the sight of her altogether.

She was dressed in a dark silk gown, her hair was braided with care, and she wore earrings and other ornaments. Meanwhile her mother, with bare arms and scanty petticoats, was washing in the little outhouse behind. There was a fire in the sitting-room where Alice was, and at it she sat warming her feet. Her mother stood on the streaming bricks.

"Have you come home for good, Alice?" I asked. "I mean, have you left your place?"

She simpered and blushed, and in a voice intended to convey much meaning, she answered that "she had not left it yet."

She was not exactly disrespectful, but there was that in her manner which annoyed me—a *total absence* of the old candour and openness. It

gave me the idea that she would not bear any questioning. After talking kindly of other things, I said a few words about spending too much money on dress, and about the poverty at home; but they were ill received, and evidently looked on as an interference. In heaviness of heart I departed. But when Alice had gone back I went to see Mrs. West, who was rather disposed to shield Alice.

"She's like to be married, ma'am, and young folks is soon lifted up you see."

"And do you know anything of the man she is engaged to?" I asked.

"No, ma'am, but he came to meet her the evening she went back, and my John says he's right down a gentleman. But if you please, ma'am, not to mention it, as Alice didn't wish it. We heard nothing more then, for a letter my husband wrote to her was not answered.





CHAPTER V.

ABOUT this time we were compelled to leave home, on account of sickness among our children, for some months. In our news from home came no tidings of Alice West's marriage, but there was always so much to be told that we thought it had probably taken place, and that it had escaped mention in our letters by accident.

It was a time of anxiety and sorrow to us, and when we returned to our home in the spring our number was one short. We began our parish work with heavy hearts, but among all the changes that had taken place in our absence there was none that made them heavier than the tidings that Alice West had fallen, and that she and her child were at home, a burden on her parents.

It was the old, old story. A promise of marriage from a superior, a too-ready belief, and



a grievous fall. I felt that this, if any, was a case without excuse. There had been no close crowding in rooms, no ignorance, but a sinning in the face of warnings, in the face of a full knowledge of her duty, and, as we had hoped, of a truly religious principle.

On the following Sunday not one of the Wests were at church. What no sorrow of God's sending could have done, that Alice's sin had done.

It had bowed her father and mother to the dust with shame. They could not face their neighbours in the house of God.

As time went on ~~they~~ did come, but they did not recover from ~~their~~ stricken look. A heavy burden had been ~~laid~~ on them, and the man who a year ago had been so proud of his child, now bent in heavy sobs over his prayer-book, begging for her forgiveness.

At first he had said ~~she~~ should never darken his roof, but the mother's argument prevailed, "She might be driven to a life of sin." So she had been received, and had never been seen outside the door—so the neighbours said.

I went to the cottage, but she kept out of my way, and as I hoped in time to regain a hold over *her*, I thought it wiser not to press to see her then,

especially as her mother told me "she took on terribly."

The Wests were poor, and it was a heavy trouble in a pecuniary point of view; but this was the least part of their grief, and they would not take a sixpence of the money which had been regularly offered them by Mr. Wray, the lawyer at Downham. "The neighbours should never say Alice was living on his bread," was West's unflinching reply.

Now Alice began to see her folly and sin in their true light. She had spent all her earnings on dress, and it was as much as she could do to clear off her debts with her last wages.

It was not to be expected that she should be truly penitent at once, and she was not. She felt shame and bitterness, but as yet she was too much inclined to blame others, and to excuse herself. The books and newspapers she had read had told her that there were others more wicked than herself. Yes, others who hold a place in society, and are courted and thought much of!

Why should her sin be visited so heavily?

But happily these thoughts were not natural to her, and by degrees, and after severe struggles, she got the better of them. Mr. Wood spoke to

her of going to service again, but she was unwilling to go yet, and the next thing we heard of her was that she was working in the fields for the support of herself and her child.

She, the delicately nurtured, superior servant, who latterly had had every comfort; her hands utterly unused to labour, her feet weary, and her heart,—oh, how sad beyond all telling!

But, hardest of all to bear was the degradation; the taunts of the men and women with whom she worked; the supposition that “Alice wouldn’t hold her head quite so high, nor be so mighty particular now.”

Once, after some words of this kind had been spoken to her, her mother told me that she rushed home in a frenzy of tears, an agony of self-reproach.

“I thought, ma’am, she would have lost her senses.”

At last she consented to go to service again, and I well remember the day.

It was the harvest thanksgiving. The labourers met at church in the morning, and were afterwards feasted and waited on by the farmers and others. Nearly all were seated at the long *tables*, and unconsciously one looked round for

stragglers, lest any should by oversight be omitted.

Far away, as feeling that she had no part with festive doings, stood Alice, her child in her arms. I went to the place where she stood, and spoke kindly to her. In another moment the hot tears were dropping on the baby's face, and her lip quivered as she vainly tried to answer me. Later in the day I had some more conversation with her, and in the end she promised me to take a place if I thought her fit for one, and to do her best in it; the remembrance of the past forbade over-confidence, and we could only hope and pray that the lesson she had learned would never be blotted out. Her parents were willing to keep the child with them.





CHAPTER VI.

At this time, as I said at the beginning of my story, I was in London, and had been trying among my friends to find a suitable home for Alice.

Some shook their heads at once, others wanted more certain assurance of steadiness than I could give; one talked of danger to the other servants, another of anxiety to herself as mistress.

I almost despaired, because I saw that all these reasons were good ones.

But, when I least expected it, I found for her a home which was all we could desire. No doubt there was great anxiety and need of faith, but my friend trusted as we did that all would be well. She was so truly large-hearted in her charity that ~~she~~ asked for no character but ours, no opinion ~~but my husband's~~. All she desired to know was

whether Alice West was humble, and really anxious to redeem her character; and also whether, as I said before, she could keep the sad secret.

There would have been no difficulty in finding second-rate places for her. Some employers are only too ready to take people with insufficient characters.

Very few comparatively trouble themselves as to what goes on out of their sight, provided only that the work of which they have the superintendence is done.

How very few there are in any trade or calling who prefer character to ability. How many who, for the sake of a clever servant, or workwoman, or shopman, will wink at faults, nay, even at gross sin, if it does not interfere with their own interests.

Mrs. Ainsworth's was the place of all others for Alice. She lived alone with her sister, who was an invalid; and the other servant was one who had been with them for years, and was thoroughly trustworthy. Indeed, she was so strict in her integrity, and severe upon those who were otherwise, that Mrs. Ainsworth would not have liked her to know anything of Alice's past life. She felt sure that had she known, she would have

conceived a prejudice which would have made it hardly possible for Alice to remain.

So I was asked to settle the matter when I returned, and to make this condition. She might freely speak to her mistress of the past, but to all others she was to be silent regarding it.

I therefore sent for Alice when I returned, and put it all before her as plainly as I could. I would not take her answer then, but begged her to consider the happy chance of leading a new life, which was now given her, and the blessed trust which was again reposed in her.

On the following day she came to tell us that she was prepared to accept the condition, and to do her best. She seemed so humble and distrustful of herself that we were very hopeful.

On the morning of the day which had been fixed for her going I called to see her. She was in low spirits, partly at the thought of leaving her child, but also from the dread of going among strangers. She was not able to take with her so good a stock of clothes as she thought necessary; her illness and providing for her child had swallowed up her small means.

Under the most favourable circumstances it is *an anxious thing* to recommend a servant. When

all you know of a person is satisfactory, you may be grievously disappointed, either by their own conduct, or by that of others to them. How much, then, is that anxiety increased when they are sent away with the full knowledge that they have been tried and found wanting. Those who have known anything of this will understand our relief when, a month after Alice had gone to Mrs. Ainsworth, I received letters from herself and from her mistress.

The latter told me that Alice was going on as well as could be wished, and that she seemed happy. The former I give at length. It ran thus, with some corrections of spelling :—

“ London, 4th Nov.

“ Dear Madam,

“ As you requested me to write to let you know how I get on in London, I feel a great honour in doing so, and in reply I beg to say I think I shall be very comfortable with Mrs. Ainsworth. They are very nice, kind ladies, indeed, and also my fellow-servant ; we are very happy together, and I sincerely hope we shall continue to be so. I do indeed feel that you and Mrs. Ainsworth have

been very great friends to me, and that I am much indebted for your kindness, but sorry to say that I cannot in any way repay you only by doing my duty while in Mrs. Ainsworth's service, and in every way try to please them, which I will endeavour to do to my utmost. Dear madam; I feel I am a great sinner in the sight of God, and that I can scarcely hope to be forgiven; but still He has promised to forgive us if we earnestly repent of our sins. I do pray earnestly for forgiveness, and for His guidance and protection for the future to keep me from temptation for the time to come. And may I ask you to remember me in your prayers? I was not aware at the time of temptation of the grievous sin I was committing against Almighty God. I return you very many thanks for your kindness. I must now close this letter, from

“Your humble and obedient servant,

“ALICE WEST.”

The days were early, but still these letters were a great relief to us. A good start in such a case is an important thing, and we trusted that it had been made, and that, as she said, her sin now appeared

to her in a new light. I afterwards found that the fear of never being forgiven pressed heavily on her at this time.

We had another cause of fear when she went to London—it was on the score of her health. The change from warm rooms and good living to a damp, draughty cottage, with poor food, had tried her much; and then her illness had come, and after it her out-door work, with its exposure to wind and weather.

Before she went to London, a hacking cough had come on, and a sudden paleness often succeeded a bright hectic flush. Our fears, however, appeared to be groundless. Later still she wrote home, saying that she was quite free from pain and cough, and that she was feeling stronger than she had done since she left Downham Park.

Six months passed, and Alice came home looking as well as ever, and she was contented and happy. What a contrast was this holiday to the last! Quiet and modest, but very silent, her manner was all we could wish. And with humble, downcast looks, she remained on the Sunday morning with her father to the Holy Feast. Strange that, in proportion to her sadness, her father's

spirits should rise. Passing strange to some it seemed, though not to us, that he should be happier in her than when she came back from Lord Marsden's in all her happy brightness.

She felt as a captain might whose vessel had been cast adrift on the rocks and had suffered damage, but which now was in safe anchorage, and could no more be tempest-tost, or, if tempest-tost, not lost. But Alice was not free from trials: she carried about with her this grievous secret, and it was hard to bear. She was so afraid of being questioned, that she did not dare to say a word about her home. She could not mention the child; she pondered over its face in her mind, and its loving little ways; but she had no right to the remembrance, and at this last thought her heart sank.

Her fellow-servant was a thoroughly good, sensible person, but somewhat severe. Alice believed, that if she learnt her secret she would scorn her as a hypocrite who had taken her in. And yet sometimes she wished that Elizabeth knew it, then the worst would be over; but she could never find courage to tell it. If ever she was so inclined, some severe words about those *who had sinned* "knowing better," would make

her shudder at the thought. Besides, she had promised. As it was, they were very good friends, and when the summer came round Elizabeth proposed that, during the absence of Mrs. Ainsworth and her sister on a round of visits, she should ask leave for Alice to accompany her to her home for a day or two. They readily obtained this leave, and when the time came they most thoroughly enjoyed their run into the country.

Alice breathed freely among those who could know nothing of the past. She was treated with such kindness and consideration, too, in Elizabeth's home, that she felt sure that all that had been said of her there was kind and pleasant. It was a very happy home, and the picture of comfort and neatness. Amos Taylor was a station-master, and his wife having died, his daughter Maria kept his house. There was also a son, a guard on the line.

The same strict principle prevailed among them all. None of them could make allowance for any fault. They had been well taught, and accustomed to comfort and quiet; they knew little of the temptations of the outer world.

Taylor himself was silent and somewhat morose. Those who knew him respected him, but chance

passengers were sure to call him surly, and none dared bring into the little station, where he reigned supreme, any light language or oaths. He would allow no such thing. He had only consented to his son's being a guard on condition that he took one night's work a-week, and kept his Sundays free. No Railway Company, he said, should make a heathen of any one belonging to him.

And the son, though now a man, recognised the principle, and never dreamt of doing otherwise. This brother, Robert Taylor, was the hero of his sisters—so upright and true was he, and so manly. They had never known him do an ungenerous or unkind thing—they thought him perfection. When this is the case, and a brother has been all-in-all to them, sisters are often jealous of any other influence, especially that of a woman. Perhaps Maria was jealous, but Elizabeth, not being at home, was not so. She thought Alice would be "the very wife for Robert."

"I don't see how you can know that, though," said Maria, in answer.

"But who could know better? I have been in the house with her for eight months, and I never knew a better girl. So pretty as she is, to be so *tsteady*! Why, Maria, if she's sent out on an

errand, she's back as soon, or sooner, than I should be; and she's as modest as she can be. She can't bear a stranger to speak to her—she trembles at the least thing; and she's so good-tempered.”

“I don't see what her trembling has to do with her being a good wife for Robert, though,” rejoined Maria.

“Of course not. But you know quite well what I mean—she's so different from the bold girl we've dreaded for him, I can't help wishing it.”

“Well, wish what you like, but don't say too much about it; if you do, they will be set against each other.”

It will be seen that Maria was coming round—in fact, she had been won by Alice's own gentle manner, and caught herself hoping that Robert might some day bring her home as his wife. Alice heard a good deal in his praise, and was quite inclined to believe all she heard, but she knew there was that feeling in all the Taylors that would shrink from her as a hateful thing.



CHAPTER VII.

THE sisters thought that Elizabeth's scheme had failed. Robert had come certainly more than once to Mrs. Ainsworth's, but had not appeared to have any special object in coming. He was civil and pleasant to Alice, but did not seem to have come to see her as much as Elizabeth.

So that matters did not proceed until another summer came, and with it the excursion as before to Elizabeth's home. This time a week was given, and the evening before they were to go back, Robert Taylor asked Alice West to be his wife. She was not to give her answer then, nor in the morning—she was to think it over well, and write to him. He did not heed her earnest protest, her emphatic “No, it cannot be!” he would take no *answer then*.

She could not have answered him at length.

She felt that. All that she could do would be to write. She did not see him again till the next morning, just as they were starting for London.

Robert met her on the platform, and put her in the carriage; and as he did so, she caught sight of a face she remembered.

It was that of a fellow-servant at Lord Marsden's—Allen, a footman, whom she long ago scornfully rejected. The sight of him overpowered her. It brought to her mind days long past, but standing out from the present in agony. And he was shaking hands with Robert. Not only so, but, as the train was leaving, she felt sure he had recognised her, for he had looked at her with astonishment, and had then turned to Robert, as if to ask about her. He had seen their parting.

Elizabeth could not understand the look of acute misery with which she hid her face in her hands. She felt almost sure that Robert had proposed, and that Alice liked him. And if so, why this terrible emotion?

Alice was, in truth, filled with fear. She could hardly suppose that Allen, who owed her no goodwill, was not now telling her story to Robert. She was right; he was telling it; and he did not say one word of excuse for her. To Robert it

sounded like a story of inexcusable wickedness. Allen heeded not the deadly whiteness of his face nor his clenched hands. Allen did not notice this, because the only words Robert spoke were quite calm. He only said,—

“Are you sure of all this, Allen?”

“Sure! I should think I was sure,” rejoined the other. “If you doubt my word, you can ask Wray’s clerk; he pays the money, or ——”

Allen did not finish the sentence. Robert had turned away with a sinking heart. His first faith, and the whole affection of a pure, manly heart, had been given none the less heartily because very cautiously. And this was the end of it all. He groaned and writhed under the knowledge that this woman, whom he loved so truly, was a hypocrite. That, while she had pretended to be so modest, so steady, she had not scrupled to receive the wages of her sin.

Robert did not remember, in his misery, that she had refused him. He had thought nothing of those few hasty words of hers, because she had given him many proofs that she did care for him. He knew that it rested with him whether she ever became his wife or not; and he had already fully *determined what to do.*



By that night's post he sent off his letter. Not such a one as he had hoped and intended to write, urging his suit, and expressing his love for her, but a few cold words, withdrawing the offer he had made, "in consequence of circumstances which had come to his knowledge." He did not tell her how his heart bled, nor enter upon his own feelings in any way, lest she should think he might waver. Elizabeth's face was bright and full of fun, as she brought her letter to Alice the next morning. She knew the hand and the postmark, and she looked on the letter as the fulfilment of her hopes. She held it up above Alice's head, playfully teasing her all the time.

"What would she give for it? Did she know it was coming? Would she really like to have it now?"

But Alice was in no mood for jesting. Life had been tolerably real to her for some time past, and, just now, anything in the way of a joke was intolerable to her. Ever since she left Robert a heavy load of anxiety had been gnawing at her heart. She had not been able to shake it off; and now, when Elizabeth held up the letter which sealed her fate, the suspense was more than she *could bear*.

"Elizabeth, you are unkind; give it me."

Elizabeth saw that she was really vexed, and giving it her, left her.

She had expected this very thing. All day and all night she had expected it; but now it came. Her eyes grew dim, and the words seemed to burn deep into her soul.

"Was no pardon to be given her in this world?" she thought.

All that day she moved about as if she had been in a dream. Her face had lost all its colour and brightness, and there was something in her manner, when Elizabeth questioned her, that showed plainly that all was not well.

Mrs. Ainsworth noticed that Alice looked ill; but she said, in answer to the inquiry whether she was so, that she had a bad headache, and thought she should be better to-morrow.

Elizabeth really was pained; and, after seeking to win her confidence without success, she wrote home to ask Maria for an explanation. The answer she received was not calculated to make things clearer. Robert had been very much out of spirits ever since Alice left, and had desired Maria to be silent about her.

The sisters, much against their will, came to

the conclusion that he was not treating her well. Once, when Maria hinted this to him, he had rushed away and had not come back for some hours. For sometimes he was inclined to think he had been too severe. In some moments of weakness he found himself making excuses for her, and wondering whether, if the time were to come over again, he should do as he had done.

Then the upright spirit within him said,—

“Yes, you would have done the same, Robert; you would never have respected her as you must respect your wife; you could not bring up that child with your children; you would never have borne that the past should be alluded to.”

And then Robert would see that he had done wisely, and wish from the very depths of his soul that they had never met.

Alice had learnt, now that she had lost it, what is the worth of such love as he would have given her, and also what that other was worth. She got through her duties, and was as well liked as before, but her cheerfulness was gone for ever. The future was all dark to her.

And, after a time, her health began to cause serious alarm. The cough, which we thought was *gone, returned*, and Elizabeth noticed that her

breathing was short and quick after very little exertion, and that her nights were disturbed.

For many weeks she did not complain, and Mrs. Ainsworth found great difficulty in persuading her to come home. But at last she gave way, and came. Mrs. Ainsworth promised to wait a certain time for her, but her heart misgave her as to whether she would recover.

Alice felt that she should not return, and she could not leave Elizabeth with the impression that she had acted deceitfully towards her, or that she had intentionally deceived Robert. For two years they had lived together, and shared every confidence but this. Alice knew that Elizabeth thought well of her, and it was a bitter trial to her to resolve that the time of their parting should open her eyes, and lower her opinion of her.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE last night had come, and Alice was weaker still. Her clothes were scattered about the room, and Elizabeth packed them while she lay on the bed watching her. They were both dreading the parting, and now and then the big tears gathered in Elizabeth's eyes. But Alice's mind was filled with that which was to come before the parting, and at last she said, "Lizzy, you have been too kind and good to me."

A shake of the head was the only reply.

"But I say you have; you would not have loved me if you had known all about me."

Elizabeth looked up, startled not so much by the words as by the tone; and then stretching out her arms to her and holding her in a close embrace, as if she feared to lose this one true friend, *Alice told her all.* She did not see her face, b

she felt her tremble. For one moment she fancied she tried to disengage herself, but it must have been fancy, for now she held Alice as lovingly as ever.

When she came to tell of the grief of losing Robert's love, Elizabeth understood it all.

"Oh, Alice dear, if you had told me sooner, I would have persuaded him, and your life would have been ——"

"'Saved!' you were going to say. No; my life might have been spared a little longer if I had not grieved so, but this cough and weakness is no new thing. It was coming on when I came here first, only I was so taken care of, and," she added in a low voice, "so happy."

"But, Alice, he would have forgiven you in time."

"No, it is better as it is. I had no right to expect such love as he would have given me. Some day when I am gone you will tell him that the other was a wild dream of sin, and that I never truly loved any but him."

It had all been too much for Alice, and as the night wore on, Elizabeth could hear now and then a sob, which told of the struggle within. Whatever she could think of to say in the way of com-

fort she said, but she felt that there was not much to be said. Alice was plainly drooping, and Elizabeth saw in her all the fatal signs which one by one had showed themselves in her own mother, who had died in decline. Nothing remained to them both to speak of except a future, not of this life, but one where sin truly repented of is washed away in the blood of Christ, and remembered no more.

“I don’t think I should fear to die if I knew He would forgive me,” said Alice; “but I was not like those who knew no better. I was taught, and threw away my teaching. I knew that light books did me harm, but I read them whenever I could get them. I have stayed at home from church, on pretence of being busy or not well, on purpose to read books or papers I ought not to have looked at. Then, when I was tempted, I had my mind full of evil thoughts. I had left off my prayers, and never opened my Bible, and I used even sometimes to laugh at holy things. When I remember it all, I feel that I cannot be forgiven; and yet you know, Lizzy, I may very soon die.”

Poor Alice was overwhelmed with the past, the present, and the future. Just now there seemed to her to be no gleam of hope. And as yet she could *not lay hold of the promises to the repenting sinner.*

The warnings, the terrors of Holy Scripture, were more present to her mind than the encouragements and hopes.

“I shall never go back, ma’am,” said Alice to me the day after she came from London. “I am not so strong as I was a month ago; I am weaker even than I was last week; perhaps in another month——”

Her voice faltered. She had tried to realise how ill she was, but when she looked steadily forward to the end she could not feel resigned. She could not part with her health, her life, without a pang.

But the end was not so near. She was weak, it was true, but not absolutely laid by. In fact she revived so much with us that, not many days after her return, she began to look forward to going back to Mrs. Ainsworth at the appointed time; and when her month was within one week of its close, she came herself to tell me that she had written to say she should be there without fail on the day which had been fixed.

I begged her not to set her heart too surely on this, but she seemed confident of her improvement, and, in answer to a letter from her mistress asking

if this improvement were really likely to be lasting, I could give no reason why it should not be. It was not enough to say that my heart misgave me.

Only one day remained. On the morrow, the Monday, she was to go back. On Sunday she was at church, and Mr. Wood and I spoke to her after the service. She waited for a letter I was to send, and also to say goodbye to us. She looked very fragile, but spoke very cheerfully and said she was well. But we were not surprised to receive a message that evening begging us to go down to her as soon as we could. She wished to see my husband particularly.

On our way to the cottage we met Mr. Martin, the doctor. He shook his head, he thought there was little hope, but everything depended on her being kept perfectly quiet. She had walked quickly up the hill from church, and had broken a small bloodvessel; the exhaustion, he said, was very great, but with care it was of course possible that she might get over it.

We went softly in. West sat by the door with Alice's child sleeping in his arms. The little thing had won for itself a warm place in his love, unwelcome as it had been at first. The lads, too, now *young men*, were at home, and all the faces looked

as if they had been in tears. They spoke in whispers, and seemed to be listening attentively for sounds from upstairs.

West could only repeat what the doctor had said—it was all he knew. He wished me to go upstairs, so I went very softly. Alice was lying with closed eyes. Her breathing was oppressed, and a look of pain every now and then shot across her face. Her mother said she was not asleep, and as she spoke the poor girl slowly turned her head towards me and opened her eyes, and stretching out her hand, she made a sign to me to come nearer. But it was not me that she wanted. She had something to say to my husband. Her mother and I stood apart as she spoke to him very feebly, and in short sentences. In low, faint whispers, she told him now all her fears—the doubts of God's mercy, which had been weighing so heavily on her mind. He spoke to her of the precious Blood that cleanseth from all sin, and of the blessed promises of God to the truly penitent, and after a while she seemed happier.

Her mother was in fear lest she should bring on the bleeding from the lungs again, and begged her not to talk more. But one thing remained.

She wished to commend the child to us.

“Would we keep her from temptation, and guard her from evil as much as we could?”

My husband could not promise that she should never be tempted, but he assured her that all he could do in the way of advice and care he would do. But we could not help remembering that the poor young mother had had all these advantages, and had fallen.

For many weeks Alice lingered. Sometimes she revived sufficiently to make some slight exertion, which was sure to throw her back into more than her former weakness.

Elizabeth Taylor came to see her, and brought her from Mrs. Ainsworth's many comforts and little luxuries. But still more were sent to her by Robert, though she never knew it.

The money which he had put by to furnish his house was spent on ice, and grapes, and jelly, for her he had loved so truly.

But no skill or comfort could avail to save her, and she gradually sank. I found, when I went in as usual one afternoon, that the spirit had passed away an hour before. Her mother said that she had died quite peacefully; but that her last words to her sisters, who had been sent for from their *places*, were very solemn. She had tried to show

them how she had first grown careless, and had entreated them not to bring such a blight on themselves and their home as she had done.

“And she was right, ma’am,” added Mrs. West; “it has been nothing but trouble to us. She might have done better than most girls, and look how it’s ended! She has never been a bit of comfort to us since she’s been grown up till lately, and now she’s gone; and there’s the child to be provided for: and it wasn’t for want of telling.”

I did not think the present a fitting time to remind her that she had over-indulged Alice, and that she had been so proud at the thought of her child marrying above her station, that she had not made any inquiries about the man’s character.

Parents forget how often they have a hand in bringing on hours of shame and sorrow. How often have I seen a mother neatly and becomingly dressed, carrying the bundle of the over-dressed and silly daughter, who was ashamed to own her mother. Ay! and the mother holding back, and fearing to lower her daughter by appearing to belong to her. If you watch for these things, you may see them at railway stations, and almost everywhere.

Alice’s funeral was hurried on that the sisters

might stay for it. It took place on a bright November morning. The sun, after many struggles, had broken through,—fit emblem of her who, we humbly trusted, was landed on the eternal shore after so many dark and stormy days.

There were few in Elminster who did not know that the bell was tolling for Alice, and to some it spoke in tones of solemn warning.

It could not be expected, however, that those who followed the hounds that morning should know or care anything about the bell or the burial, and so it happened that the son of Lord Marsden's agent, now promoted to be an agent himself, rode by to the meet, and as he rode he passed the little procession.

He remarked to the man by whose side he rode, that he thought he had seen that old fellow before, but he couldn't remember where.

Ah! but he *did* remember. He remembered quite well a summer evening and a gift, which not long after was returned to him with words of bitter scorn. He remembered an interview with Lord Marsden, in which that old man was his accuser, and though, to some extent, reinstated, he knew that that interview was not forgotten. As *he passed he scanned the other faces, while West*



clenched his hands tight, and, even in the presence of the dead, could hardly keep back the bitter curse that rose to his lips as their eyes met.

But the hunting of the prosperous man is spoiled. He asks a question of the first unconcerned spectator he meets,—a garrulous old man. He asks whose that corpse might be? and in answer he hears that Alice West is buried to-day, and the information is followed by unwelcome truths, which would have been made ten thousand times more unwelcome had a suspicion crossed the mind of the teller as to who this was that asked the question.

He changes his mind about hunting that day, and as he goes home to his young wife a vague suspicion haunts him that the balance of justice has not been quite even, and that, in this life, people sometimes get on rather better than they deserve.

There was another stranger in Elminster that day. He came by one train and went back by the next. Elizabeth Taylor, who had come to the burial, noticed him; he was unknown to all else. He did not go to the home from which Alice had been brought, but in a far corner of the *churchyard* he listened to the solemn words,—

“Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were like a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?”

Some months afterwards we noticed that a plain cross had been put over Alice West's grave. It had on it her initials and her age. Her parents had not put it there, and they did not seem to know who had done so.

Soon Alice and her story will be forgotten; but those who read this little account of her may be helped by it to “keep themselves pure.”



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